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THE CLOSING OF THE NOBILITY AND COUNCIL OF DUBROVNIK IN THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT: This article addresses the closing of the nobility and Major Council of Dubrovnik as a long-term process most clearly articulated in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Analysed are the criteria used for the definition of nobility and its closing before the actual closure of the council, while special attention has been given to the preserved lists of the Major Council membership from the mid-thirteenth and early fourteenth century, their purpose and effect. As the Venetian *Serrata* of the last decades of the thirteenth and first decades of the fourteenth century proved to have been a model and impetus for the closing of the Ragusan along with other Dalmatian councils, its meaning as well as different interpretations of this process are being thoroughly considered. The article compares the method and effects of the closing of the Ragusan council with those of other cities of the Eastern Adriatic. The interpretation of these processes as presented in Ragusan chronicles inaugurates the final assessment of the significance and consequences of the closing of the Major Council of Dubrovnik.

Key words: Dubrovnik, commune, nobility, closing of the council, *Serrata* of Venice

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The meaning of the notion of nobility and nobles (*nobilitas, nobilis*), their identity, origin, the way of ruling and how they handed down power to their descendants varied in different historical contexts. *Nobilis* in the Middle Ages may have stood for any free man not engaged in manual work, a knight, magnate, a city notable of worthy descent, any person who distinguished himself from the community majority in terms of status, and whose social distinction the community recognised. Considering that within the urban communal environment there also existed different ways and procedures of ennoblement, the notion of nobility rendered more than a single meaning in its *longue durée*. Doubtless, the urban component was an essential part in the definition of communal nobility, although certain towns tended to seek their own solutions within this frame—some included non-urban aristocracy into the political life, others, however, excluded it, some closed the city noble rank, while others opened it. The wealth status of the nobility greatly varied, and so did their life style. In order to understand the nobility it is very important to fathom how this group shaped through time, what mechanisms it used to transform into a ruling elite, how it constructed its identity and self-image. Urban nobility such as that of Dubrovnik was not an outcome of ennoblement by higher authority, but of differentiation within urban community on the basis of certain criteria—origin, wealth, ability and merits, as well as lineage power, according to the principle *civitas sibi princeps*, that is, power *de facto*.¹ The social status of this elite was linked to land, although its wealth came primarily from trade. In the twelfth and notably thirteenth century, the economic and demographic growth of the city gave way to the rise and social climb of merchants, who began to hold political offices in the community. The advancement of the merchant stratum was one of the foundations of the development of citizenry, and later also of communal institutions, because the differences in property status affected the political division of the society. Noble lineages sought legitimacy of their exclusive social position in origin, family heritage, honour and marriage ties. Yet, ancient origin, tradition and social prestige proved insufficient with time, as the ruling group had to make a clear cut from all those potentially inclined towards political rights. A need for clearer legitimacy and handing down of

¹ Mario Ascheri, *Siena e la città-stato del Medioevo italiano*. Siena: Betti, 2004: p. 50; Guido Castelnuovo, »Bartole de Sassoferato et le Songe du Vergier. Les noblesses da le cité à l'aune du royaume«, in: *Circulation des idées et des pratiques politiques: France et Italie (XIIIe-XVe siècle)*, ed. Anne Lemonde and Ilaria Taddei. Roma: École française de Rome, 2013: p. 98.

hereditary rights of the prominent citizens led to more solid criteria for the elite status. Distinction by property and social criteria was complemented by the political criterion as dominant. Political rights and power became recognisable attributes of the noble status, in other words, by connecting nobility with participation in the communal bodies and offices, the *nobiles* came to be defined as those who had access to power. The notion *civis de consilio* was identified with that of *nobilis*.

The nobility expanded the criteria that resulted from real privileges and power with an ideological debate on the blood and virtue nobility, on the ancient tradition of civic freedom and the nobility's contribution to its preservation. The debate was grounded on classical and contemporary authorities, but primarily on the communal political practice. One of the questions that could not be avoided was whether hereditary nobility should enjoy exclusive privilege or the nouveau riche should be allowed ennoblement. Once the council was closed, power remained solely in the hands of the elite, and this had to be justified in ideological terms.² Highly ideologised, rhetorically elaborate political language was necessary in order to legitimise the current order and social hierarchy, and to reject any close connection between economic and political power. Utilised for this purpose were the family genealogies, chronicles, law preambles, council minutes, speeches and correspondence with the council members. The nobility shaped the discourse on the exclusive history of its class, relating it closely to the commune/Republic itself, thus producing an image of itself as a God-given elite which protects all citizens and inhabitants. This was further buttressed by the accounts on exemplary individuals, office-holders of the commune/Republic.³

Political system was the main means of social promotion, as it allowed decision-making but also access to material and symbolic resources. This was best felt in the second half of the thirteenth century, when the elite began to differentiate more clearly. The first list of Ragusan councillors and communal

² Zdenka Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom: The Nobility of Dubrovnik between the Middle Ages and Humanism*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2015: pp. 65-78, 402-410. Cf. Guido Castelnuevo, »Bons nobles, mauvais nobles, nobles marchands? Réflexions autour des noblesses italiennes en milieu communal (XIIe – début XVIe siècle)«. *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes* 13 (2006): pp. 88-94.

³ For more in: Lovro Kunčević, »Discourses on liberty in early modern Ragusa«, in: *Freedom and the construction of Europe*, vol. 1, ed. Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012: pp. 195-214; idem, »On Ragusan *libertas* in the late Middle Ages«. *Dubrovnik Annals* 14 (2010): pp. 25-69.

office-holders has been traced in a document from 1253, an agreement between Bulgarian emperor Michael Asen and Dubrovnik against Uroš I, king of Serbia. Mentioned in it are one hundred witnesses, noblemen from 72 noble lineages out of the existing 129 at the time. It is likely that in that period the council was also electoral. The document testifies to the already quite elaborate administrative structures of the commune. In addition to the Major Council, also mentioned are the Minor Council and the *Consilium Rogatorum*, four city judges, three paymasters (*visjeri*), three municipal attorneys (*parci*), and two city attorneys and the treasurers of the cathedral.⁴ Recorded in the minutes of the Ragusan councils from the early fourteenth century are the lists of office-holders and councillors who were chosen every year on Michaelmas by the Venice-appointed counts and the Minor Council. According to the Statute, they could freely decide on the Major Council membership, maintain old members or choose new ones.⁵ The interests of certain *casate* may have been considered, yet the decisive role in this choice was played by the count, representative of Venetian government, who strictly adhered to this prerogative. As testimony to this is the fact that Venice did not allow the election to take place through the electors, mentioned in Venice itself from 1207, and confirmed by law in 1282.⁶ Bariša Krekić draws attention to the important role of Venetian rule, correlating directly the process of the closing of the Ragusan nobility and council with Venetian dominance over the city from 1205. He argues that, under the influence of the Venetian model, during the thirteenth century Ragusan nobility became increasingly exclusive until its final definition through the closing of the council in 1332.⁷

⁴ *Diplomata et acta saec. XIII*, ser. 76, no. 215, State Archives in Dubrovnik (hereafter as: SAD); *Monumenta Serbica spectantia historiam Serbiae Bosnae Ragusii*, ed. Franz Miklosich. Viennae: apud Gulielmum Braumüller, 1858: pp. 35-40; *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae* (hereafter as: *Codex diplomaticus*), vol. 4, ed. Tadija Smičiklas. Zagreb: JAZU, 1906: pp. 528-533; Nenad Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, vol. 1 - *Korijeni, struktura i razvoj dubrovačkog plemstva*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2011: pp. 23, 52-70, 82-86, 217-219.

⁵ *The Statute of Dubrovnik of 1272*, ed. Nella Lonza. Dubrovnik: Državni arhiv u Dubrovniku, 2012: I, 3B; N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, vol. 1: pp. 20, 217.

⁶ Benjamin G. Kohl, »The Serrata of the Greater Council of Venice, 1282-1323: the Documents«. [ed. Reinhold Mueller], in: *Venice and the Veneto during the Renaissance: the Legacy of Benjamin Kohl*, ed. Michael Knapton, John E. Law and Alison A. Smith. Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2014: pp. 8-11.

⁷ Bariša Krekić, »Dubrovnik and Venice in the thirteenth and fourteenth century: a short survey«, in: idem, *Unequal Rivals. Essays on relations between Dubrovnik and Venice in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2007: pp. 14, 26.

Ragusan lists of the members of the Major Council prior to its closure in 1332 confirm that several decades before the closing the noble circle was de facto defined, though not yet formally closed.⁸ A list from 1301 includes the names of office-holders chosen by Count Marco Dandolo. That year 126 members from 81 lineages or branches sat on the Major Council.⁹ Entered into the list of the next year, 1302, are 80 councillors from 61 noble lineages or branches (the list does not include the members of the *Consilium Rogatorum* and Minor Council, 55 in all).¹⁰ Sitting on the Major Council in 1303 were 80 members from 49 lineages or branches.¹¹ Mentioned in the lists from the very start of the fourteenth century are certain names found neither earlier nor later, while some cannot be traced in any document. The lists from 1301 and 1302 mention Junius Rapallino and Janinus Odanus. I have no knowledge of the criteria by which Junius Rapallino entered the Major Council, nor of his descent, but his name

⁸ Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom*: pp. 101-102.

⁹ I am grateful to Academician Nenad Vekarić for the identification of certain individuals. I was unable to link the following persons to any noble lineage: Martolo, son of Franco and Marinus, son of Pasqua Imbuscho. Noble lineages and branches whose members constituted the Major Council in 1301: Babalio, Balislava, Benessa, Binzola, Birrisina, Bisti (Bona), Bocignolo, Bodaza, Bona, Bonda, Bubagna, Bocignolo, Caboga, Casiça, Celipa, Crieva, Ceria, Chino, Chisagna, Clemente, Clime, Cranca, Crose, Dersa, Gambe, Ganguli, Gauçolo (Vladimiri), Georgio, Gervasio, Grade, Gundula, Juda, Luca (Sclavi), Lucari, Magdalena, Menachi, Mergnucho, Menze, Mlascagna, Muto, Pabora, Pecorario, Petragna, Poza, Proculo, Prodanello, Ragnina, Resti, Saraca, Schimosiça, Sorento, Sorgo, Spavaldo, Stilo, Tefla, Trepagna, Tudisio, Villano, Vitagna, Volcassio, Zamagno. *Monumenta Ragusina. Libri reformationum*, vol. 5, ed. Josephus Gelcich [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, vol. 29]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1897: pp. 7-9.

¹⁰ The list included the following lineages and branches: Babalio, Bacante (Benessa), Balaça, Bausella, Benessa, Berrisina, Binzola, Bodaza, Bona, Bubagna (Ronçino), Bucignolo, Caboga, Capsiza, Celipa, Ceria, Cereva, Chisagna, Churaça, Cluno, Cranca, Crose, Dersa, Gambe, Georgio, Getaldi, Gleda, Goyslavo, Goze, Gundula, Juda, Luca (Sclavi), Lucari, Marinelli, Martinussio, Mauressa, Menachi, Menze, Mergnucho, Mlascagna, Pabora, Pecorario (Goze), Petragna, Poza, Proculo, Prodanello, Ragnina, Resti, Saraca, Saruba, Sorento, Sorgo, Spavaldo (Croze), Stilo, Surani, Tefla, Trepagna, Tudisio, Villano, Volcassio, Zamagna. I have not been able to trace the following persons in the Ragusan noble circle: Martol, son of Franco, Johannes, son of Niffico, Luchar, son of Demitro, Marcus, Nicola, Blasius, Janinus Odanus, Junius Stagillita and Blasius, son of Marinus. *Monumenta Ragusina. Libri reformationum*, vol. 5: pp. 39-40.

¹¹ Bausella, Benessa, Binzola, Bodaza, Bona, Bonda, Caboga, Catena, Ceria, Cereva, Chisagna, Çhuraca, Crose, Dersa, Gambe, Gamo, Georgio, Getaldi, Gleda, Goyslavo, Goze, Gundula, Juda, Luca (Sclavi), Mauressa, Martinussio, Maynerio, Menze, Mlascagna, Muto, Pecorario (Goze), Pisino, Poza, Ragnina, Resti, Saraca, Saruba, Scarich, Schimosica, Scocilça (Stilo), Sorgo, Sorento, Stilo, Tefla, Trepagna, Villano, Volcassio, Volze and Zamagna. *Monumenta Ragusina. Libri reformationum*, vol. 2, ed. Josephus Gelcich [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, vol. 13]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1882: pp 301-302; vol. 5: pp. 62-64.

appears in some other documents from the end of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, as well as the members of his family. He was engaged in trade and took loans from his fellow citizens, nobles mainly, and had a house as well as *casale* in Dubrovnik.¹² A somewhat different case was that of Janinus Odanus, who in 1302 not only sat on the Major Council but was also a judge. His descendants are not mentioned in the council either. Considering that the name Odanus does not appear in other contemporary sources, there is reason to assume that he was a close confidant of the count. At that time, count exercised far greater authority in the council than later, and was thus in a position to decide on someone's membership. Laurentius Belligna, mentioned in the list from 1302, was apparently linked to the lineage mentioned in the chronicle by Anonymous as Betisgna or Belligna. According to the chronicler, this lineage originated from Siena, and died out in 1375. Under the name Betisgna, considered erroneous by N. Nodilo, they are mentioned by Ragnina, who also refers to their Tuscan origin. The same may well be true of Johannes Vossica—both chronicles mention the Tisiza/Tossiza lineage, quoted by Anonymous to have died out in 1359, and by Ragnina in 1317.¹³ The list of 1302 mentions Marinus Canilli, known in other documents as Marinus Canueli/Canouello. His daughter Anna is mentioned in 1298 as a potential candidate for St Clare's Convent, which leads to a conclusion that she was of noble descent.¹⁴ As a member of the Major Council mentioned in 1303 is Paulus de Cita. Paulus himself, his wife Desa, daughter Laurentia and a couple of other members of the Cita family are mentioned by the end of the thirteenth and in the first decades of the fourteenth century. This lineage has not been traced in the traditional lists or

¹² *Diversa Cancellariae*, ser. 25, vol. 5, ff. 11v, 19, 94v; vol. 6, ff. 69v, 78v, SAD; *Diversa Notariae*, ser. 26, vol. 1, ff. 3v, 26, 32, 42v, 66; vol. 2, ff. 4, 26; vol. 3, f. 179v, SAD; *Spisi dubrovačke kancelarije*, vol. 2, ed. Josip Lučić [Monumenta historica Ragusina, vol. 2]. Zagreb: JAZU, Centar za povijesne znanosti Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 1984: p. 226; vol. 3, ed. Josip Lučić [Monumenta historica Ragusina, vol. 3]. Zagreb: JAZU and Zavod za hrvatsku povijest, 1988: pp. 106, 114, 228, 247, 304; vol. 4, ed. Josip Lučić [Monumenta historica Ragusina, vol. 4]. Zagreb: HAZU and Zavod za hrvatsku povijest, 1993: p. 210.

¹³ »Li Annali della nobilissima republica di Ragusa«, in: *Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina*, ed. Speratus [Natko] Nodilo [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, vol. 14]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1883: 148, 161; Nicolò Ragnina, »Annali di Ragusa«, in: *Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina*, ed. Speratus [Natko] Nodilo [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, vol. 14]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1883: pp. 182, 185.

¹⁴ *Spisi dubrovačke kancelarije*, vol. 2: pp. 224, 239, 364; vol. 4: pp. 172, 324.

in Asen's charter.¹⁵ The lists compiled after the year 1303 feature no such cases—all members of the Major Council belong to the famous noble lineages of Dubrovnik.¹⁶

The next surviving list of the Major Council is that from 1312, compiled during the countship of Bartuccio Gradonigo. The names of 188 councillors from 71 families were entered into this list, while the *Consilium Rogatorum* had 63 members from 39 families. The members of 21 families occupied 160 council seats out of the overall 188, while thirty families were represented by only one member.¹⁷ Communal offices were executed by the members of 38 lineages or branches.¹⁸ The number of councillors in this list is by far greater as compared to the previous lists, yet the reason to this should not be sought in the council's enlargement. Contrarily, the list mirrors the already defined noble circle headed by the demographically dominant families. In my opinion, this marks a crucial point in the course of the process of the definition of hereditary

¹⁵ Paulus de Cita and his wife Desa are mentioned in the will of Dobra de Guerero from 1284. *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vol. 6, ed. Tadija Smičiklas. Zagreb: JAZU, 1908: pp. 459-463, 465-466; Mentioned in 1282 is don Marinus de Cita, abbot of the church of St Michael de Labe. *Testamenta*, ser. 10.1, vol. 1, f. 6v, SAD. Laurentia, daughter of Paulus de Cita, drafted a will in 1325, in which she mentions a modest property – a furnished wooden house which ought to be sold in order to pay off the legacies. As executors of the will she appointed her sister Bratussa and priest Laurentius, the godfather. *Testamenta*, vol. 3, f. 1.

¹⁶ Nenad Vekarić argues that all individuals entered in the lists prior to the council's closure, who did not belong to distinguished noble families, were actually members of the nobility whose families had become extinct before the council's closing. Nenad Vekarić, *The Nobility of Dubrovnik: Roots, Structure and Development*, forthcoming.

¹⁷ Major Council membership in 1312 included the following lineages and branches: Babalio, Bacante (Benessa), Balislava, Batallo, Benessa, Binzola, Bocignolo, Bodaza, Bona, Bonda, Bubagna, Caboga, Calich, Catena, Celipa, Cepre, Cereva, Ceria, Chisegna, Cluno, Cranca, Crose, Dabro, Deodati, Dersa, Felice, Gambe, Gangulo, Gamo, Georgio, Getaldi, Gisla, Gleda, Gondola, Goze, Grade, Juda, Lucari, Macino, Martinussio, Mathie (Matessa?), Mauressa, Menachi, Menze, Mergnucho, Mlascagna, Pabora, Pecorario, Petragna, Picinego, Poza, Prodanello, Ragnina, Recus, Resti, Saraca, Saruba, Scarich, Schimosica, Sclavi, Scocič (Stilo), Sercuto, Sorgo, Stilo, Tefla, Tudisio, Vilano, Vitagna, Volcassio, Volze, Zamagna. More than a half of the seats on the council was occupied by the families Binzola, Bodaza, Cereva, Crose, Dersa, Georgio, Gundula, Goze, Martinussio, Menze, Petragna, Sorgo, Stilo, while the Bodaza, Georgio, Menze and Sorgo distinguished themselves as the most dominant in terms of representation. Next in line of the numerically dominant were the Babalio, Benessa, Cereva, Lucari, Poza, Saraca and Volze.

¹⁸ Babalio, Binzola, Bodaza, Bona, Bubagna, Celipa, Churača, Cranca, Crieva, Crose, Dersa, Georgio, Gleda, Grade, Gundula, Juda, Luca (Sclavi), Lucari, Martinussio, Menachi, Menze, Mergnucho, Miroslavo, Petragna, Pičinego, Posestra, Ragnina, Recus, Saraca, Saruba, Scocič (Stilo), Sorgo, Volcassio, Volze, Zamagna and Zavernico.

council membership by means of list making, which was finally completed with the closing of the patrician council and rank in 1332. Decision of the Minor Council of 28 September 1312 also bears witness to this tendency, by which all members of the Major Council absent from the city, may and shall be the members of the council upon return, up to the next elections.¹⁹ An increased number of individual entries leads to a conclusion that the eligibility for council as the basic principle of membership was seriously compromised, and that the nobility intended to construct membership on lineage affiliation. A year later, in 1313, the decision from 1312 was repeated, regulating that the previous-year members, whenever they arrived in Dubrovnik, could sit on the council until the next elections, which testifies to the attempts on behalf of the lineages and *casate* to secure council continuity.²⁰ The list of Major Council membership from 1319, in addition to Count Ugolino Giustinian, together with the Minor Council and *Consilium Rogatorum*, mentions 233 councillors, yet 59 names have been crossed out. The latter could have been the members from the previous year or those who were absent from the city, but there are scribe errors, too, i.e. repetition of certain names. Yet, all the names crossed out belong to the well-established noble lineages, and not to the “new” ones.²¹ Of the mentioned 73 families, the members of 42 of them executed communal offices.²² After

¹⁹ *Monumenta Ragusina. Libri reformationum*, vol. 1, ed. Josephus Gelcich [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, vol. 9]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1879: pp. 11-14.

²⁰ With regard to representation on the council, the Menze and Sorgo dominated, followed by Babalio, Benessa, Cereva, Crose, Georgio, Gundula, Lucari, Menze, Petragna, Ragnina, Sorgo, Volcassio and Volze. *Libri reformationum*, vol. 1: pp. 33-34.

²¹ Major Council membership in 1319 included the following lineages and branches: Babalio, Baraba, Batalo, Benessa, Berissina, Binzola, Bobalio, Bodaza, Bona, Bonda, Bucignolo, Caboga, Calich, Catena, Celipa, Cereva, Ceria, Chisagna, Crancha, Crose, Dabro, Dersa, Gambe, Gangulo, Georgio, Getaldi, Gleda, Goze, Grade, Gundula, Lucari, Luca, Martinussio, Mauressa, Menachi, Menze, Mlascagna, Muto, Pabora, Pecorario, Petragna, Piçinego, Poza, Prodanello, Ragnina, Recus, Resti, Saraca, Scarich, Schimosiça, Sclavi (Luca), Scocilcha (Stilo), Sorento, Sorgo, Spavaldo, Stilo, Tudisio, Villano, Vitagna, Volcassio, Volze and Zamagna. Those crossed out belonged to the lineages and branches of Babalio, Birrisina, Bodaza, Bona, Bubagna, Bucignolo, Ceria, Cherpa, Chimo, Crose, Deodati, Felice, Gambe, Georgio, Goze, Gundula, Juda, Lucari, Marcus, Mauressa, Menze, Piçinego, Proculo, Ragnina, Ribiça, Saraca, Saruba, Scocilça, Sorgo, Spavaldo, Stilo, Vitagna and Zamagna. The council was dominated by the lineages Binzola, Bodaza, Dersa, Georgio, Menze, Petragna and Sorgo. *Libri reformationum*, vol. 5: pp. 151-154.

²² Babalio, Benessa, Binzola, Bodaza, Bona, Bonda, Bucignolo, Caboga, Celipa, Ceria, Crieva, Crose, Deodati, Dersa, Georgio, Gleda, Gundula, Juda, Luca, Lucari, Martinussio, Mauressa, Menachi, Menze, Pabora, Pecorario, Petragna, Piçinego, Poza, Ragnina, Resti, Saraca, Saruba, Schimosiça, Sorgo, Stilo, Tudisio, Vitagna, Volcassio, Volze, Zamagna and Zavernico.

1319, the lists of communal office-holders no longer included the Major Council membership, which implies that the hereditary criterion had been at work well before the council's closure in 1332. Branislav Nedeljković holds that the closing had de facto taken place between 1319 and 1325, but no registers of the councils' deliberations (*Reformationes*) from this period are extant. In this he sees the strengthening of Ragusan nobility with regard to the Venice-appointed count, who until then chose the members of the council, together with the Minor Council.²³ The Minor Council decision of 1328 on the distribution of grain, by which one *starium* per head would be distributed *pro quolibet nobili et grasso populari*, testifies that the noble stratum was recognised as separate and that there existed a higher citizen stratum, *popolo grasso*, which did not enter the council.²⁴

Council membership implied participation in executive power, that is, offices, the number of which was experiencing a steady rise. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, the administrative apparatus significantly outnumbered its thirteenth-century structure—in 1301 it included five judges and six councillors, who together constituted the Minor Council, in addition to 35 members of the *Consilium Rogatorum*, vicars, attorneys of the *Curia Maior*, municipal attorneys, justiciaries, paymasters, customs officials and their scribe, procurators of the cathedral, overseers of municipal territory, overseers of land and vineyards, overseers of cloth seals, granary procurators, procurators and attorney of the Lokrum monastery, along with the commanders of the guard. With the exception of the attorney of the Lokrum monastery, all offices were collegial. The offices mushroomed in the years to come, so that, apart from the mentioned, there were also officials in charge of equipping ships with arms, grain measurers, overseers of public works, scribes and overseers of the city and extramural area.²⁵ Although the highest offices of the state were non-remunerative honours, an increasing number of noblemen earned money in public service, which was another reason for limiting the number of those who had access to offices.²⁶

²³ *Libri reformationum*, vol. 1: pp. 12-14; vol. 5: pp. 8-9, 152-154; Branislav M. Nedeljković, »Nekolike karakteristike i opaske o dubrovačkom pravu i državi 1358-1460«. *Istorijski časopis* 18 (1971): p. 105; Vinko Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808*, vol. 1. Zagreb: NZMH, 1980: pp. 122, 336.

²⁴ *Libri reformationum*, vol. 5: p. 264.

²⁵ *Ibidem*: pp. 7-9, 39-40.

²⁶ Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom*: pp. 234-236.

Nenad Vekarić argues that only from the moment of the council's closure can we speak of the Ragusan nobility in the true sense, because until then the nobility and citizens were one and the same, that is, there was not a separate group of citizens, considering that all Ragusan *cives* belonged to the noble circle. Every person who was given a chance to enter the council before its closing was, by so doing, recognised as nobleman.²⁷ Nada Klaić was the first in Croatian historiography to come forward with this thesis, asserting that all those who in the early stages of communal development of Zadar and Split had the right of citizenship, entered the privileged group, *meliores* and later *nobiles*, while those who settled later were deprived of the political rights.²⁸ Echoed in this assumption are Machiavelli's words on the Venetian government structure, by which in Venice all those who may govern are called patricians. He states that the inhabitants of the Venetian lagoons often met to decide on the city, and that they promulgated laws and established administration. Once they considered that their number was sufficient for political life, they denied access to the council to all newcomers, and recognised those who governed as patricians, and all the rest as commoners.²⁹ Machiavelli's opinion on the very beginnings of the commune in which all were citizens/patricians because they were all equal is simplified, since not everyone was equal in the beginnings, yet offers a solid basis for the investigation of the notion and reality of the citizenry and population of the commune. It coincides with the fact that the communal self-government in the Dalmatian towns may have developed due to the absence of stronger high authority during the shrinking influence of the Byzantine Empire in the Adriatic, when, on the foundations of classical heritage and Church organisation, the commune emerged as a fruit of the citizens' self-organisation.³⁰ The theses set forth by N. Klaić and N. Vekarić open an essential question which consequently should alter our view of medieval communal society. Namely, the rigid image of medieval society characterised by the strictly differentiated social groups, with clearly defined and distinct rules—noblemen, citizens, inhabitants and subjects—is seriously challenged by the insights on the reality of these societies from the early medieval period on. The research

²⁷ N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, vol. 1: pp. 19-23.

²⁸ Nada Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata u razvijenom srednjem vijeku*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1976: pp. 155-157.

²⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius*, ed. Ninian Hill Thomson. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & company, 1883: I, 6.

³⁰ Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom*: pp. 93-98.

of the Ragusan and Dalmatian Middle Ages indicates that there were no clear-cut borders between these groups, except for the nobility, whose framework was defined by firm political and legal criterion from the fourteenth century onwards. The nobility itself was also defined by the criteria other than political, because it was socially recognisable as well, and connected with other inhabitants in many ways.³¹ Moreover, European magnate and city elites that were never closed, and they represented a majority, were also noble according to the criteria of birth, noble descent, recognised social status and the right to power.

One should also bear in mind that the definition of nobility changed, so that *meliores* and *nobiles* from the earliest Ragusan documents were noblemen, although they differed from the nobility of the legally, economically and politically developed commune of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Noble women should also be mentioned here, who had a clearly discernible and recognised noble status, although they had no political rights. Nobility was not solely reduced to the assumption of public duty and execution of public offices, but manifested just as equally in the social and private sphere.³² Family, kinship ties and patrimonial relations played a significant role in medieval society, and in that realm the influence of women was strongly felt. In a bilaterally defined nobility such as that of Dubrovnik, the women's descent and noble status were of crucial importance. Given that the participation in power could have been attained exclusively on the basis of affiliation to a particular lineage circle, marital policy was an important segment of the social and political strategies. Endogamy was an essential political tool of the Ragusan nobility as it preserved their purity and distinguished them from other social orders. Kinship ties and the size of dowry were of great importance for the social position of the family and individual. Thus the noble women, as daughters, wives and mothers of noblemen, contributed to the distinction and closing of the noble circle. Their contribution to marital alliances and affinal network was paramount—they connected the *casate* and maintained kinship relations, they preserved the family memory and lineage consciousness. Through their social networks they

³¹ Cf. Pietro Costa, *Civitas. Storia della cittadinanza in Europa*, vol. 1 - *Dalla civiltà comunale al Settecento*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1999: pp. 8-10, 12, 18-20; Sandro Carocci, »Social mobility and the Middle Ages«. *Continuity and Change* 26/3 (2011): p. 368.

³² P. Costa, *Civitas. Storia della cittadinanza in Europa*, vol. 1: pp. 13-14, 45-48; Julius Kirshner, »Cittadinanza come genere nelle città-stato del Medioevo e del Rinascimento«, in: *Innesti. Donne e genere nella storia sociale*, ed. Giulia Calvi. Rim: Viella, 2004: p. 21.

maintained solidarity, cemented business and political ties, and structured the noble class in a manner different from their male counterparts.³³ Restrictive policy of the communal authorities towards the admission of candidates into nunneries is also a testimony of the closing of the noble elite. These provisions were primarily related to the Convent of St Clare, which, from its foundation in 1290, accepted daughters of the nobility only.³⁴ Decision of the *Consilium Rogatorum* of 8 January 1379, by which the abbess from St Clare's was instructed to expel a foreign nun "upon the honour of our nobility and its sisters, our sisters and daughters, noble women of Dubrovnik" testifies that the process of segregation had been completed well before the legal bans concerning the admission of non-noble and foreign women were passed in 1393, 1415, 1422 and 1426.³⁵ Other nunneries, though not strictly exclusive, were also subject to the surveillance of communal authorities in this respect.³⁶

Model and roots of the closing of the council in Dubrovnik and Dalmatia—Venetian serrata (thirteenth and fourteenth century)

On the last day of February 1297, a decision was passed by which the Major Council of Venice could be entered only by those who had sat on the council over the last four years or were descendants of those who were members from 1172, when the council was established as a sovereign government body, which weakened the power of the doge and that of the popular assembly. This decision defined the election procedure in which *Quarantia* played a pivotal role.³⁷ The

³³ Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom*: pp. 278-305. Cf. Stanley Chojnacki, »Daughters and Oligarchs: Gender and the Early Renaissance State«, in: *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Judith Brown and Robert C. Davis. London-New York: Longman, 1998: pp. 63-86.

³⁴ N. Ragnina, »Annali di Ragusa«: pp. 222-223; Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom*: pp. 312-314. For Zadar, Split and Trogir, see: Zrinka Nikolić, *The Formation of Dalmatian Urban Nobility: Examples of Split, Trogir and Zadar*, PhD thesis. Budapest: Central European University, Department of Medieval Studies, 2004: pp. 126-130, 153.

³⁵ *Monumenta Ragusina, Libri reformationum*, vol. 4, ed. Josephus Gelcich [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, vol. 28]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1896: p. 189; *Liber viridis*, ed. Branislav Nedeljković. Beograd: SANU, 1984: cc. 80, 147, 178, 209; *Acta Consilii Maioris*, ser 5, vol. 2, f. 103, SAD.

³⁶ *Acta Consilii Rogatorum*, ser. 3, vol. 20, ff. 148, 227; vol. 27, f. 156-156v; vol. 30, f. 22v; vol. 34, ff. 91v, 152v-153, SAD.

³⁷ Samuele Romanin, *Storia documentata di Venezia*. Venezia: Pietro Naratovich editore, 1854: pp. 271-272.

Major Council had already been defined de facto in the course of the thirteenth century as a body of the Venetian patriciate. Moreover, the closing of the council had not taken place by the decision of 1297, but was the fruit of the debates and decisions from the period 1282-1323.³⁸ The proposition by which eligibility for the council should be based on hereditary right, that is, the members could be only those whose father or paternal ancestors had sat on the council, was put forward in 1286 by Doge Pietro Gradenigo, with the support of *Quarantia*, but then priority was given to the electoral principle. The debate between the two groups on the council continued—those who considered that the Minor Council should regulate entry according to political interests on the one side, and those who wished to institute the hereditary principle and preserve class purity on the other.³⁹ After 1297 there was a succession of co-options for the Major Council, particularly at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and also after the decision from 1323, which finally restricted the membership to those whose father or grandfather sat on the council. The nobility also expanded through marital ties between patricians and illegitimate patrician daughters and wealthy commoners, which was legitimate and did not bring the hereditary status into question with regard to the offspring. Yet despite all, the fact remains that starting from 1297 the council reformed towards its closing and the political monopoly of the patriciate.⁴⁰

³⁸ Gerhard Rösch, »The Serrata of the Great Council and Venetian Society, 1286-1323«, in: *Venice Reconsidered*, ed. John Martin and Dennis Romano. Baltimore-London: John Hopkins University Press, 2000: pp. 68-69, 79.

³⁹ *Ibidem*: pp. 72-74; B. Kohl, »The Serrata of the Greater Council«: pp. 11-16.

⁴⁰ Frederic C. Lane, *Storia di Venezia*. Torino: Einaudi, 1991: pp. 131-135; Giorgio Cracco, »Patriziato e oligarchia a Venezia nel Tre-Quattrocento«, in: *Florence and Venice: Comparisons and Relations. Acts of Two Conferences at Villa I Tatti in 1976-1977*, vol. 1 - *Quattrocento*, ed. Sergio Bertelli, Nicolai Rubinstein and Craig H. Smyth. Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1979: pp. 73-76; Stanley Chojnacki, »In Search of Venetian Patriciate: Families and Factions in the Fourteenth Century«, in: *Renaissance Venice*, ed. John R. Hale. London: Faber and Faber, 1973: pp. 53-58; idem, »Marriage Legislation and Patrician Society in Fifteenth-Century Venice«, in: *Law, Custom, and the Social Fabric in Medieval Europe. Essays in Honor of Bryce Lyon*, ed. Bernard S. Bachrach and David Nicholas. Kalamazoo, Mich.: University of Michigan, Medieval Institute, 1990: pp. 164-165, 167; idem, »Social Identity in Renaissance Venice: The Second Serrata«. *Renaissance Studies* 8/4 (1994): pp. 350-351; Jean Claude Hocquet, »Oligarchie et patriciat à Venise«. *Studi veneziani* 17-18 (1975-1976): pp. 401-410; Reinhold C. Mueller, »Espressioni di status sociale a Venezia dopo la "serrata" del maggior consiglio«, in: *Studi veneti offerti a Gaetano Cozzi*, ed. Gino Benzoni, Marino Berengo, Gherardo Ortalli and Giovanni Scarabello. Venezia: Il Cardo, 1992: p. 55; Anna Bellavitis, »La famiglia "cittadina" veneziana nel secolo XVI: Dote e successione. Le leggi e le fonti«. *Studi veneziani* N. S. 30 (1995): pp. 59-60; Maria-Teresa Todesco, »Andamento demografico

Venetian *serrata* of 1297 has long been part of the myth of a perfect Venetian government, assessed in historiography as a point when the Republic was born and when the status of the Venetian ruling elite was legally defined. The chronicles of Dandolo, Giustinian, and Trevisan speak only of the enlargement and not of the closing of the council in 1297. Yet fifteenth-century chronicles already describe a closed, hereditary patrician class, differentiated from the commoners. Attention of the Renaissance authors was drawn by the closed nature of the Venetian patriciate which preserved its political and other privileges, and denied access to new members. Thenceforth, the Italian political thought articulated a viewpoint by which the *serrata* was an essential political and social factor, even the foundation of the myth of Venice as an ideal republic with a perfect, mixed government.⁴¹ In the sixteenth century Marco Barbaro explicitly states that “a noble citizen is a person who can be elected into the Major Council, whilst other citizens, though distinguished, cannot be elected into the Council even if they had an emperor for father”.⁴² Marin Sanudo writes that true patricians of Venice secretly agreed to close the Major Council, having observed that some commoners and people of lower order pursued offices and magistracies as if they had been born into ancient nobility.⁴³ Machiavelli also gave his opinion on the Venetian *serrata* as the foundation of aristocratic organisation. In his view, a high proportion of nobility in the overall population (around 10%) was essential, for only sizeable nobility was able to fulfil its political goals. Another precondition for their success was that they denied access to power to all non-patricians. That, in his opinion,

della nobiltà veneziana allo specchio delle votazioni nel Maggior Consiglio (1297-1797)». *Ateneo Veneto* 176 (1989): pp. 124, 129, 134, 139-140; James C. Davis, *The Decline of the Venetian Nobility as a Ruling Class*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1962: p. 19; G. Rösch, »The Serrata of the Great Council«: p. 77; Dorit Raines, »Cooptazione, aggregazione e presenza al Maggior Consiglio: le casate del patriziato veneziano, 1297-1797«. *Storia di Venezia* 1 (2003): pp. 34-38.

⁴¹ Guido Ruggiero, »Modernization and the mythic state in early Renaissance Venice: The Serrata revisited«. *Viator* 10 (1979): pp. 245-246.

⁴² Margarete Merores, »Der große Rat von Venedig und die sogenannte Serrata vom Jahre 1297«. *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 21 (1928-29): p. 85; G. Rösch, »The Serrata of the Great Council«: pp. 70-72.

⁴³ Marin Sanudo, »Vitae ducum venetorum italicae scriptae ab origine urbis, sive ab anno CCCXXI usque ad annum MCCCXCIII auctore Marino Sanuto, Leonardi Filio, Patricio Veneto«, in: *Rerum italicarum scriptores ab anno aerae christianae quingentesimo ad millesimum quingentesimum*, vol. 22, ed. Lodovico Antonio Muratori. Milano: Ex typographia societatis palatiae in regia curia, 1733: col. 583.

facilitated a unique and stable government as well as social balance, and with it, the longevity of the Republic.⁴⁴

The majority of Venetian historians have accepted a thesis by which the *serrata* is the key turning point that defined the ruling elite in legal terms and secured state stability until the end of the eighteenth century. Yet, different interpretations have brought into question the traditional definition of the *serrata* and its social and political meaning. Some historians interpret the *serrata* in the context of an increasing significance of the Major Council, that is, its enlargement, and not in the context of the closing of the patrician class, though admitting that the decision of 1297 was part of a long-term process that defined the council membership on the basis of two undisputable criteria—blood and political function.⁴⁵ The fact that the closing process developed gradually has given rise to numerous interpretations and discussions about the structure of Venetian aristocracy, transparency of the criteria determining one's belonging to the ruling elite, along with the effects of the *serrata* on the definition of nobility and the Republic itself.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ N. Machiavelli, *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius*: I, 5; Gaetano Cozzi, »Mletačka Republika u novom vijeku - od rata za Chioggiju do 1517. Politika, društvo, ustanove«, in: *Povijest Venecije*, vol. 1, ed. Gherardo Orthali, Giorgio Cracco, Gaetano Cozzi and Michael Knapton. Zagreb: Antibarbarus, 2007: p. 359; idem, »Domenico Morosini, Niccolò Machiavelli e la società veneziana«, in: Gaetano Cozzi, *Ambiente veneziano, ambiente veneto. Saggi su politica, società, cultura nella Repubblica di Venezia in età moderna*. Venezia: Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 1997: pp. 109-154.

⁴⁵ Frederic Chapin Lane, »The Enlargement of the Great Council of Venice«, in: *Florilegium Historiale: Essays Presented to Wallace K. Ferguson*, ed. John Gordon Rowe and William Herbert Stockdale. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1971: pp. 255-256; Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, *Venise: une invention de la ville (XIIIe-XVe siècle)*. Seyssel: Champ Valon, 1997: pp. 207-208; eadem, »Venise et ses apogées: problèmes de définition«, in: *Le città del Mediterraneo all' apogeo dello sviluppo medievale: aspetti economici e sociali*. Pistoia: Centro Italiano di Studi di Storia e d'Arte Pistoia, 2003: pp. 66-67.

⁴⁶ S. Chojnacki, »In Search of Venetian Patriciate«: p. 71; idem, »Social Identity in Renaissance Venice«: pp. 341-358; idem, »La formazione della nobiltà dopo la Serrata«, in: *Storia di Venezia*, vol. 3 - *La formazione dello stato patrizio*, ed. Girolamo Arnaldi, Giorgio Cracco and Alberto Tenenti. Rim: Fondazione Giorgio Cini di Venezia, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana Roma, 1997: pp. 641-725; Giorgio Cracco, »Venecija u srednjem vijeku: Drugi svijet«, in: *Povijest Venecije*, vol. 1, ed. Gherardo Orthali, Giorgio Cracco, Gaetano Cozzi and Michael Knapton. Zagreb: Antibarbarus, 2007: pp. 206-209, 214-216; idem, »La cultura giuridico-politica nella Venezia della "serrata"«, in: *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. 2 - *Il Trecento*, ed. Gianfranco Folena. Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1976: pp. 248-255; B. Kohl, »The Serrata of the Greater Council«: pp. 6, 17-20, 23-27, 31; G. Cozzi, »Mletačka Republika u novom vijeku«: pp. 263-264, 359-360; M. Ascheri, *Siena e la città-stato*: p. 95; Gherardo Ortalli, »Venedig«, in: *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 8, ed. Norbert Angermann. München: LexMa, Artemis, 1997: p. 1465; James S. Grubb, »Elite Citizens«, in: *Venice Reconsidered*.

What can be deduced from all these interpretations is that the result of the mentioned process was the closing, that is, the shaping of a strong ruling class and the clear criteria for the Major Council membership.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Venice saw various measures aimed at the process of self-definition of the Venetian patriciate, among which mandatory registration of patrician marriages and birth of legitimate sons were of utmost importance.⁴⁷ Registration was a precondition for entry into the council, as formulated in the minute of the Council of Ten, "so that the dignity of our Major Council would not be nor shall be dishonoured, tarnished or in any other way offended".⁴⁸ These measures enhanced the value of descent and status by the female line, legitimate patrician marriage as well as of endogamy, upon which rested the stability of the Venetian patriciate from the Middle Ages to the end of the Republic.⁴⁹ The mentioned measures also echoed in the decisions of the Dubrovnik government: *Liber omnium reformationum* contains a provision from 1334 by which a young man is eligible for the Major Council once he reaches twenty years of age and if his father, mother or brother, and he himself swear upon it. Only on these terms can he be entered into the book of the Major Council.⁵⁰ In addition, the contracts and arrangements of betrothal and dowry were strictly supervised, of which notary documents were drafted, while starting from 1440 all new members of the Major Council were registered in the *Specchio del Maggior Consiglio*, the book of communal office-holders. From the end of

The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State 1297-1797, ed. John Martin and Dennis Romano. Baltimore-London: John Hopkins University Press, 2000: pp. 345-346, 352-352; G. Rösch, »The Serrata of the Great Council«: pp. 68-69, 70-76, 79; idem, *Der venezianische Adel bis zur Schließung des Großen Rats. Zur Genese einer Führungsschicht*. Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1989: pp. 72-81; Victor Crescenzi, "Esse de Maiori Consilio". *Legittimità civile e legittimazione politica nella Repubblica di Venezia (saec. XIII-XVI)*. Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1996: pp. 331-345; D. Raines, »Cooptazione, aggregazione e presenza al Maggior Consiglio«: pp. 1-6, 18-19, 22-25; J. C. Davis, *The Decline of the Venetian Nobility*: p. 15.

⁴⁷ S. Chojnacki, »Marriage Legislation and Patrician Society«: p. 170.

⁴⁸ Cited from: M. T. Todesco, »Andamento demografico della nobiltà veneziana«: pp. 132-133.

⁴⁹ Stanley Chojnacki, »Identity and Ideology in Renaissance Venice: The Third Serrata«, in: *Venice Reconsidered. The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State 1297-1797*, ed. John Martin and Dennis Romano. Baltimore-London: John Hopkins University Press, 2000: pp. 263-278, 281-283.

⁵⁰ ...et tunc scribatur in libro Maioris consilii. »Liber omnium reformationum civitatis Ragusii«, ed. Aleksandar Solovjev, in: *Dubrovački zakoni i uredbe*, ed. Aleksandar Solovjev and Mihajlo Peterković [Istorisko-pravni spomenici, vol. 1]. Beograd: Srpska kraljevska akademija, 1936: p. 57 (X, 2).

the fifteenth century the book of *Matrimonia nobilium Ragusinorum* was also kept, established for the purpose of financial support for patrician marriages.⁵¹

Therefore, Venetian patriciate was not closed as a result of the decision of 1297, yet it marked the beginning of the definition of the circle of lineages, several dozen of them, which around 1350 constituted the *nobiliorum proles Venetiarum*.⁵² As the Major Council had become the main legislative and electoral body, its membership decided to legally define its status which no longer depended on office. By suspending the restriction regulating the body's size and by confirming the right to membership to all those who had previously participated in the council and public offices, the membership increased, but that proved to have been a mere side-effect of the decision of the council's closure, and not its primary purpose.⁵³ By as early as 1297, a procedure regulating the admission of new members was established, while a succession of provisions up until 1323 contributed to the formation of the hereditary and stable noble elite. In a multi-decade decision-making process the political elite with its right to the Major Council membership separated from the *cives* with no political rights. Membership on the council became the basic political privilege which implied the right to act in other communal bodies, institutions and offices.⁵⁴

The closing of councils in the cities of the Eastern Adriatic

Certain Venetian historians interpreted the *serrata* as a consequence of the territorial expansion of the Republic of Venice, although the closing also took place in small cities-communes, as well as within other elites inclined towards the hereditary transfer of power.⁵⁵ Under the impact of the Venetian *serrata*,

⁵¹ *Manuali pratici del cancelliere*, ser. 21.1 - *Leggi e istruzioni*, *Indice Magistrature ed ufficiali nunc Specchio del Maggior Consiglio dictum*, vol. 1-2, SAD; *anuali pratici del cancelliere*, ser. 21.1 - *Leggi e istruzioni*, *Matrimonia nobilium Ragusinorum XV-XVI*, vol. 35; Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom*: pp. 19, 52, 112, 164-166, 294, 523.

⁵² G. Castelnuovo, »Bons nobles, mauvais nobles, nobles marchands?«: p. 96; Ennio Igor Mineo, »States, orders and social distinction«, in: *The Italian Renaissance State*, ed. Andrea Gamberini and Isabella Lazzarini. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012: p. 334.

⁵³ J. C. Davis, *The Decline of the Venetian Nobility*: pp. 16-17.

⁵⁴ G. Ruggiero, »Modernization and the mythic state«: pp. 248-251.

⁵⁵ Frederic C. Lane, *Studies in Venetian Social and Economic History*, ed. Benjamin Kohl and Reinhold Mueller. London: Variorum Reprints, 1987: p. 237; G. Ruggiero, »Modernization and the mythic state«: pp. 245-256; Fernando Fagiani, »Schizzo storico-antropologico di un gruppo dirigente: il patriziato veneziano (secoli XII-XV)«. *Studi veneziani* N. S. 15 (1988): pp. 27-30; S. Chojnacki, »In Search of the Venetian Patriciate«: pp. 47-48, 53; G. Cracco, »Venecija u srednjem vijeku«: pp. 206-209; Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom*: pp. 106-110.

during the first half of the fourteenth century and later, the councils of the subordinated cities on the east coast of the Adriatic were closed.⁵⁶ The commune of Rab had already regulated participation in the council by around 1290, when the statute defined the membership which also included commoners. Distribution of power between the commoners and nobility did not lead to the council's closing and denial of entry to new members, so that in 1364 a decision was passed with an aim to prevent the entry of inappropriate persons, that is, inhabitants of Rab engaged in manual work or foreigners. Therefore, the need for the council's closure was not necessarily related to the noble status, nor to the definition of the nobility, but was aimed at the preservation of privileges and acquired rights of the present members. However, council membership distinguished the privileged families of Rab from the rest, and they de facto paralleled noble families in terms of status.⁵⁷ In Piran, in 1307 council membership was defined as hereditary through both paternal and maternal line. No person could become member unless his father or grandfather by the father's or mother's side sat in the council benches.⁵⁸ Most Dalmatian cities, such as Bar, Nin, Kotor, Šibenik, Hvar, Pag, Korčula, Dubrovnik, closed their councils in the 1330s and 1340s. The Council of Trogir was closed in 1340 by a decision that the membership on the council may include only those whose father or paternal grandfather were already members. This council was responsible for the execution, decision and regulation of all affairs of the city of Trogir with full authority. The decision also regulates the procedure of the admission to council, which included the oath of the candidate, descendant of any Trogir nobleman or his kin. The count and judges admitted such a candidate into the council by entering his name next to those of the other councillors, and he could hold all offices like any other member.⁵⁹ In Split, too, the membership of the father and grandfather on the council was a compulsory prerequisite for the establishment of the hereditary right. In 1334, during the reign of Count Pantaleone Giustinian, it was decided that an eligible candidate had to be over eighteen, on condition that his father

⁵⁶ Tomislav Raukar, »Komunalna društva u Dalmaciji u XIV stoljeću«. *Historijski zbornik* 33-34 (1980-81): p. 169; Nada Klaić, *Trogir u srednjem vijeku. Javni život grada i njegovih ljudi*. Trogir: Muzej grada Trogira, 1985: pp. 189-190, 237-238.

⁵⁷ Dušan Mlacović, *Građani plemići: pad i uspon rapskoga plemstva. rapskoga plemstva*. Zagreb: Leykam International, 2008: pp. 246, 282-290.

⁵⁸ Angelo Ventura, *Nobiltà e popolo nella società veneta del Quattrocento e Cinquecento*. Bari-Roma: Laterza, 1964: p. 117.

⁵⁹ *Statut grada Trogira*, ed. Marin Berket, Antun Cvitanić and Vedran Gligo. Split: Književni krug, 1988: I, 53.

and grandfather were members of the council and noblemen, and not foreigners, those born out-of-wedlock and their sons. Upon this decision, the count and four selected councillors were appointed to supervise admission into the council. During the countship of Giovanni Gradenigo, in 1348 eligibility age was lowered to sixteen due to the epidemic of plague.⁶⁰ The Major Council of Hvar was closed in 1334 by decision that its members could be only those whose father or grandfather sat on the council, on condition that they were eighteen years of age and nobles. The latter condition may lead to speculation that the nobility was also distinguished and recognised by some other criteria, apart from the membership on the council. Foreigners, persons born out of marriage and their sons could not become members.⁶¹ The Council of Kotor was closed in 1361 by decision that only the Kotor nobility whose fathers, grandfathers and forefathers by the male line could sit on the council, and others not. Forty noblemen over the age of eighteen constituted the council.⁶² In Pag the Major or General Council was closed in 1422 by decision that eligible for council were only the legitimate sons and brothers of the current members, who had reached twenty years of age.⁶³ Admission to the council was also possible by means of supplication, which all inhabitants with permanent residence in the city of Pag could submit, with the exception of those from lower occupations, such as shepherds, butchers and innkeepers, as that was deemed inappropriate for the city's reputation. Yet despite the mentioned terms, D. Čepulo observes that "the Council of Pag remained closed and for more than two centuries did not admit new members, which contributed to its rapid termination".⁶⁴ Even the commune

⁶⁰ *Statut grada Splita: splitsko srednjovjekovno pravo*, ed. Antun Cvitanić. Split: Književni krug, 1998: Ref. cc. 11, 12; Zdenka Janeković Römer, »Splitski statut – ogledalo razvoja komune«, in: *Splitski statut iz 1312. godine: povijest i pravo*, ed. Željko Radić, Marko Trogrlić, Massimo Meccarelli and Ludwig Steindorff. Split: Književni krug, 2015: pp. 76-78.

⁶¹ *Statuta civitatis et insulae Lesinae*, ed. Šime Ljubić [Monumenta historico-juridica Slavorum meridionalium, vol. 3]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1882-1883: p. 385.

⁶² *Statuta civitatis Cathari. Statut grada Kotora*, ed. Jelena Antović. Kotor: Državni arhiv Crne Gore, 2009: c. 35.

⁶³ *Statut paške općine. Statuta communitatis Pagi*, ed. Dalibor Čepulo. Pag-Zagreb: Matica hrvatska Pag, Pravni fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2011: I, 7; D 5; Dalibor Čepulo, »Pravna baština i društveno okruženje Paškog statuta«, in: *Statut paške općine. Statuta communitatis Pagi*, ed. Dalibor Čepulo. Pag-Zagreb: Matica hrvatska Pag, Pravni fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2011: p. 42; Miroslav Granić, »Proces formiranja paške srednjovjekovne komune i velikog paškog vijeća do njegova ukinuća«. *Radovi Filozofskog fakulteta u Zadru* 26/13 (1986-87): pp. 237-256.

⁶⁴ *Statut paške općine*: I, 18, 23. D. Čepulo, »Pravna baština i društveno okruženje Paškog statuta«, pp. 42-43.

of Brač, which preserved much of its rural character and had no urban centre, witnessed the formation of the nobility which constituted the island council, whose members, by hereditary right, were all noblemen over 18. The council occasionally admitted distinguished commoners, but even in such circumstances it represented a privileged circle of the island inhabitants, clearly distinctive, though open.⁶⁵

Dalmatian nobility wished to attain the hereditary right to council membership and the monopoly on power, yet in none of the Dalmatian cities, not even in Venice itself, was the council closed so consecutively as it was in Dubrovnik. Under certain conditions the commoners could still filter into the council.⁶⁶ In Kotor, it was decided in 1388 that a supplication for admission could be submitted, so that “the council and the nobility be preserved in honour and that those who desire to be in the said council aspire to virtues and good state of the city”. By the end of the fourteenth century, as many as 40 commoners were admitted to the Council of Kotor, so as to establish quorum after a plague epidemic and resolve internal conflicts that led to a provisional popular government.⁶⁷ The Council of Trogir was enlarged in the first half of the fourteenth century above the previously established number of 80 members. According to a provision from 1340, every nobleman of legal birth was eligible for council, regardless of whether his father or grandfather was a member. By provision of 1341, entry into council was allowed on the basis of individual supplication which had to be approved by at least seven count’s councillors and the majority on the Major

⁶⁵ *Srednjovjekovni statut bračke komune iz godine 1305.*, ed. Antun Cvitanić. Supetar: Skupština općine Brač, Savjet za prosvjetu i kulturu, 1968: p. 97; IV, 21, 33; Ref. I, 20, 23, 52, 54, 55; Ref. II, 22; Antun Cvitanić, »Srednjovjekovni statut Bračke komune iz godine 1305.«, in: *Srednjovjekovni statut bračke komune iz godine 1305.*, ed. Antun Cvitanić. Supetar: Skupština općine Brač, Savjet za prosvjetu i kulturu, 1968: pp. 12, 16, 18, 24, 33-34, 38-46, 82-86.

⁶⁶ Tomislav Raukar, »“Consilium generale” i sustav vladanja u Splitu u XIV. stoljeću«. *Historijski zbornik* 37 (1984): pp. 95-96; idem, »Komunalna društva u Dalmaciji u XIV stoljeću«: pp. 180-182; idem, *Zadar u XV. stoljeću: Ekonomski razvoj i društveni odnosi*. Zagreb: Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Centar za povijesne znanosti, Odjel za hrvatsku povijest, 1977: pp. 34, 58; Nada Klaić and Ivo Petricioli, *Zadar u srednjem vijeku do 1409*. [Prošlost Zadra, vol. 2]. Zadar: Filozofski fakultet, 1976: pp. 223-224; Tomislav Raukar, Ivo Petricioli, Franjo Švelec and Šime Peričić, *Zadar pod mletačkom upravom 1409-1797*. [Prošlost Zadra, vol. 3]. Zadar: Filozofski fakultet u Zadru, 1987: p. 104; *Statut grada Splita*: L. II, cc. 21, 37; *Statut grada Trogira*: L. I, c. 53; Grga Novak, *Povijest Splita*, vol. 1. Split: Matica hrvatska, 1957: p. 278; Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom*: p. 109.

⁶⁷ *Statuta civitatis Cathari*: c. 43; Ilija Sindik, *Komunalno uređenje Kotora od druge polovine XII do početka XV stoleća*. Beograd: SANU, 1950: pp. 42, 89-92.

Council.⁶⁸ In Šibenik, according to a provision from 1383, membership could also be attained through individual candidacy, which was first decided upon by the count and his council, then the Council of Fifteen, and finally by the General Council. During Venetian rule, the councillors demanded permission from the count to choose one non-noble family into the Major Council every year in order to resolve the problem of its renewal. Following in the footsteps of “the most serene provisions of the famous city of Venice”, the noblemen of Šibenik in 1551 somewhat restricted the provision regulating the admission to council by deciding that those born out-of-wedlock would be denied access.⁶⁹ The Statute of Zadar had a similar procedure, into which the decision on the council’s closure was entered later, in the fifteenth century, but the council was closed much earlier, probably in the first half of the fourteenth century.⁷⁰ The noblemen of the Dalmatian cities were determined to renew the council and rank, maintaining surveillance over the restricted admission to council. Indeed, exceptions were rare, because the elites of all the cities were finally defined in the course of the fourteenth century.

Ragusan chroniclers on the closing of the council and the noble circle

Ragusan chronicles fail to speak of the closing of the council, nor on the earlier broader participation in communal government, moreover, they shift the social and political order of their day to the very beginnings of the city. To them, the privileged position of the nobility is natural and present since the origin of the city itself. Anonymous annals, in the account of the arrival of the wealthy cattle-breeding family Pecorario in Dubrovnik in 744, cite that they divided the inhabitants into three—noblemen, commoners and servants

⁶⁸ *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vol. 10, ed. Tadija Smičiklas. Zagreb: JAZU, 1912: pp. 554-555, 621.

⁶⁹ *Knjiga statuta, zakona i reformacija grada Šibenika*, ed. Zlatko Herkov. Šibenik: Muzej grada Šibenika, 1982: Ref., c. 18; *Commissiones et relationes Venetae. Listine o odnosjajih između južnoga slavenstva i Mletačke republike*, vol. 6, ed. Šime Ljubić [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, vol. 9]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1878; *Reformationes*, ser. 2, vol. 18, f. 22, 289, SAD.

⁷⁰ *Statuta Iadertina: cum omnibus reformationibus usque ad annum MDLXIII factis. Zadarski statut: sa svim reformacijama odnosno novim uredbama donesenima do godine 1563.*, ed. Josip Kolanović and Mate Križman. Zadar-Zagreb: Matica hrvatska - Ogranak Zadar, Hrvatski državni arhiv, 1997: Ref., cc. 13, 17, 18; Maja Novak, *Autonomija dalmatinskih komuna pod Venecijom*. Zadar: Institut JAZU u Zadru, 1965: pp. 38, 75, 77-78; Z. Nikolić, *The Formation of Dalmatian Urban Nobility*: p. 2.

(*gentilhomeni, populi, servidori*). He further states that “all noblemen entered the ‘zbor’ or the General Council (*sbor o ver in consegl generale*), while the ‘povulani’ or ‘pol vilani’ did not”. According to chroniclers, “thenceforth not a single nobleman could be found who would take a wife of common birth or of lower order, nor had ever a commoner taken a noblewoman for wife, as the noble blood for ever remained separated from that of the commoners”.⁷¹ Nikša Ragnina is even more explicit in his interpretation of the noble differentiation, which he also associates with the arrival of the Pecorario lineage. In his words, “in Dubrovnik of the day the noblemen are separated from other commoners and craftsmen and have become magistrates and office-holders. Prior to that year, they were like one people (*come una plebe et comun populo nelle ville*)”. For the nobles he says that they all descended from nobility, and they all “entered the council or ‘zbor’ (*sbor*), as they called the General Council”. He, too, shows contempt towards commoners by referring to them as half villains (*pol vilani*), and takes pride in the fact that “in Dubrovnik *sangue gentile* had always been separated from that of the commoners”. He also added that Ragusan noblemen were many, that they had many sons and daughters, and that because of the division of the society and noble government Dubrovnik “had majestically grown and ennobled itself”. This account is an introduction to the list of the nobility into which he entered “all noble *casate*” and their origin.⁷² He commends the ban on meat trade for nobleman, in his opinion a good and well-thought out decision aimed at “the division of the noblemen from commoners”.⁷³ Serafino Razzi in the sixteenth century has no doubts about the council’s identity, for he calls it *il consiglio dei nobili*.⁷⁴ Luccari dates the Major Council to the Early Middle Ages, when the Ragusans admitted to their city some noble families from Kotor, Risan, Ulcinj and Dioclea, and also established the Republic bodies and the Major Council, upon which the whole city is founded. As he puts it, “the fathers” wished to rule the land without struggle and passion, so they introduced a young, learned and prudent Greek nobleman, who, together with the *senato d’arango*, consolidated the young state. The wisest sat on that council, the general city council, which summoned in the splendid

⁷¹ »Li Annali della nobilissima republica di Ragusa«: pp. 9, 12-13, 22; Milorad Medini, *Starine dubrovačke*. Dubrovnik: Štamparija Jadran, 1935: p. 65.

⁷² N. Ragnina, »Annali di Ragusa«: pp. 180-181, 189-190, 201-202, 209, 221-222, 226-227, 242-243.

⁷³ *Ibidem*: p. 227.

⁷⁴ Serafino Razzi, *La storia di Ragusa*. Dubrovnik: A. Pasarić, 1903: p. 30.

palace *dei signori*. He makes no attempt to justify the differences between the nobility and commoners—he finds it quite understandable that the nobility acts for the preservation of the Republic, the welfare and salvation of the whole populace being included.⁷⁵ While writing on the Ragusan count Damjan Juda and his attempt at the usurpation of permanent personal position in the thirteenth century, the chronicler frowns mostly upon his intent “to destroy the memory, traces and the name of the Major Council as the foundation and buttress of the Ragusan freedom”.⁷⁶ Luccari’s parallel between the governments of Dubrovnik and Zadar in the Angevin period is noteworthy. In his opinion, although Zadar reclaimed its freedom thanks to King Louis, its government was far from the well-administered cities because the filling of offices, legislative and public revenues depended only on the few, which led to political partisanship. This opinion implied that Dubrovnik, a well-organised city, prospered because power in it was distributed among many, that is, among the members of the Major Council.⁷⁷ Junius Resti adopted information on the differentiation of the Ragusan society from previous chroniclers, and interpreted it from the perspective of the consolidated noble oligarchy of the second half of the seventeenth century. Similar to his precursors, he chose 743 A.D. as the year which marked the beginning of the differentiation process, but departed from their interpretations by which differentiation was accounted by the immense wealth of the newcomers from the Pecorario lineage as well as the elements of the lineage-based organisation they introduced to the Ragusan society. To the Ragusan nobility of the eighth century he attributed a conclusion that “the people’s government was inclined to numerous disorders, and that is why they decided to close the citizenry (*serrar la cittadinanza*) and separate the nobility from the populace so that only the noblemen be allowed to govern the republic”. Exclusive power of the nobility is termed as *optimate* or aristocratic, and he justifies it with a belief that the populace could not govern properly, because “the multitude bears no prudence nor order... and commitment, determination, prudent and rational reasoning cannot be expected from the populace”. Hence the republic rightly decided “to submit the ignorant and worse to the better and wiser”. In his opinion, “government is too demanding for the wise who are not engaged in

⁷⁵ Giacomo di Pietro Luccari, *Copioso Ristretto degli Annali di Rausa di Giacomo di Pietro Luccari Gentilhuomo Raguseo libri quattro dedicati all’eccelso Senato di Ragusa*. Ragusa: presso Andrea Trevisan, 1790: pp. 6, 34, 113, 186, 285.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*: pp. 67-68.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*: pp. 113-114.

manual work, let alone for the multitude, with its diverse customs, intentions and states". Aspirations of the populace for the highest status he considers pretentious, "considering that they lack ability and experience, and thus cannot bring important and weighty decisions". For this reason, the most distinguished Ragusans decided that "included among the optimates may be only those who descended from the Epidaurian nobility or who by virtue were deemed worthy or who made very important contributions to the republic and thus deserved honours". Only they constituted the Major Council, which assumed all power, and upon which the authority of the Senate and the magistrates rested.⁷⁸ Underlying Resti's view is the idea of the nobles as the protagonists of the society, bearers of inherent virtue, as opposed to non-nobles who are incompetent to rule and have no *civilitas*. His words reveal a paternalistic attitude towards non-nobles, whom the nobility should lead and keep under control. Within the context of the discourse on the council's closure, his view represents an *ex post* insight into the consequences that the closing of the council had brought to the Ragusan nobility and commune—stable and lasting aristocratic government.

The significance and effects of the closing of the Major Council of Dubrovnik

The Major Council of Dubrovnik was formally closed by decision of the Minor Council of 12 May 1332. It was decided that three *boni homines*, Marinus Binçola, Junius Dersa and Martolus Crieva, make a list of all the council members, along with those they considered worthy of entry, and to collect money from those who were absent from council on that day. This list has not been preserved. The decision does not explicitly forbid admission of new members, but it defines the privileged circle of the nobility based on hereditary membership, which had become a specific patrimony of the nobility.⁷⁹ Ancestral membership is mentioned in the ban on meat trade for all members of the council, as well as those whose father and grandfather were members, for that

⁷⁸ Giugno Resti, »Chroniche di Ragusa«, in: *Chronica Ragusina Junii Restii (ab origine urbis usque ad annum 1451) item Joannis Gundulae (1451-1484)*, ed. Speratus [Natko] Nodilo [Monumenta spectantia historiam Sclavorum meridionalium, vol. 25]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1893: pp. 19-20; Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom*: pp. 109-110.

⁷⁹ *Item in eodem minori consilio captum fuit et deliberatum quod debeant elligi III boni homines ad scribendum et reducendum in scriptis omnes qui ad presens sunt de maiori consilio, et alios qui videbuntur eis fore dignos esse de maiori consilio, et ad recolligendos denarios illorum qui hodie non fuerunt in minori consilio. Libri reformationum*, vol. 5: p. 349.

was deemed unworthy of the noble status.⁸⁰ A similar provision was voted out on the Major Council already on 17 June 1320, by which no *nobilis homo civitatis Ragusii* may stand by the meat stall nor have it sold within the next thirty days, on pain of a ten-perper fine. The reformation was suspended on 27 July. A new attempt at discouraging Ragusan noblemen from trading in meat for a period of one year followed on 25 July 1325.⁸¹ With the consent of the Major Council and approval of the populace at public assembly, Count Giovanni Foscolo in 1342 decided that none of the members of the Major Council may engage in the butcher's activity, nor be present during slaughter and skinning of animals and meat weighing, nor stand behind the meat stall, nor receive money from meat trade, on pain of a fine of 25 perpers, expulsion from the Major Council and permanent deprivation of the right to office and benefices in Dubrovnik. This decision was also entered into the city statute.⁸² In Split, too, meat trade was the first occupation prohibited to the noblemen by statutory provision, on pain of the expulsion from the council and deprivation of office.⁸³

From 1332 on, all noblemen above the age of twenty entered the Major Council. The Black Death of 1348 was the reason why the eligibility age for council was lowered to eighteen. This decision explicitly reads that every nobleman of that age "may and shall" enter the council.⁸⁴ Government structure witnessed no visible changes in the decades following the closure. Popular assembly continued to be summoned occasionally at the city square, although it no longer had the same meaning. While in the previous period the 'zbor' participated in the grants to church institutions, in the signing of agreements with other cities, approval of the statute, inauguration of the count and other

⁸⁰ ...nulli qui sint de maiori consilio, vel quorum patres seu avi fuissent vel sint in maiori consilio, possint facere beccariam de aliquibus bestiis, vel standum ad bancum ubi venduntur carnes ad recipiendum denarios ex carnibus que venduntur... *Libri reformationum*, vol. 5: p. 349; vol. 2: p. 340; *The Statute of Dubrovnik of 1272*: L. VIII, c. 92; N. Ragnina, »Annali di Ragusa«: p. 227. This provision was revoked in July 1347, and the nobles were allowed to keep butcher stores as before. *Libri reformationum*, vol. 1: p. 268. Mentioned as a scribe in a butcher store in 1351 is Savinus, son of Marin de Getaldi. *Libri reformationum*, vol. 2: p. 137.

⁸¹ *Libri reformationum*, vol. 5: pp. 173, 176; vol. 2: p. 353. A similar law was promulgated in Šibenik in 1383. *Knjiga statuta, zakona i reformacija grada Šibenika*: Ref. 9.

⁸² *The Statute of Dubrovnik of 1272*: L. VIII, c. 92C.

⁸³ *Statut grada Splita*: L. II, c. 36; Z. Nikolić, *The Formation of Dalmatian Urban Nobility*: pp. 164-165.

⁸⁴ *Libri reformationum*, vol. 2: p. 25. Cf. *Knjiga statuta, zakona i reformacija grada Šibenika*: Ref., c. 22; T. Raukar, *Zadar u XV. stoljeću*: p. 55.

office-holders, it took oath of allegiance to the doge and count, participated in the passing of laws, provisions and measures, as well as the bidding of various custom fees and revenues, after the closing of the council its only responsibility was to report on the decisions of governmental offices and bodies.⁸⁵ The role of the main decision-making body was assumed by the Major Council, as a holder of sovereignty, a body that promulgated laws and in which all office-holders were elected. At the same time, it had become the most important sign of noble status. The very notion of commune attained a new meaning—the rule of the nobility through city councils and offices. After 1332, a formulation *commune et homines Ragusii* may often be traced in documents, whereby *commune* de facto implies the nobility, which is evident in the Slavic formulation *vlastela i ljudje dubrovački* (“nobility and the people of Dubrovnik”), as written in the charter of the Bosnian ban Stjepan II Kotromanić on the granting of Rat and Ston in 1333. Later, the notion *commune*, *communitas* tended to be interchanged with the notion *dominium*.⁸⁶ On the establishment of nobility as the governors of the commune testify the statutory provisions regulating the membership of the Minor Council. According to the first version of the provision, probably drawn during the first redaction of the statute, the judges and the councillors should by birth and descent be from Dubrovnik, and should be present in Dubrovnik. The provision from the statutory redaction C, which includes amendments from the period 1358-1408, in addition to the mentioned terms also quotes that the members of the Minor Council should be *nobiles homines nativi Ragusei*. This discrepancy indicates the process of class development which had been taking place in the last decades of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, and was completed with the closing of the council.⁸⁷ The Statute of Split of 1312 regulated that judges could be only those whose fathers or grandfathers had performed this duty. Z. Nikolić interprets this as a sign of the existence of an oligarchy within the nobility itself, which is supported by the fact that after the rebellion of 1398 other noble families also acquired that right. Similar practice was also related to rectorial office, and was equally

⁸⁵ *Statut grada Dubrovnika*: passim; *Libri reformationum*: passim.

⁸⁶ *Codex diplomaticus*, vol. 10: pp. 77-81.

⁸⁷ *The Statute of Dubrovnik of 1272*: L. I, c. 3B and 3C; on manuscript version C see: Nella Lonza, »The Statute of Dubrovnik of 1272: Between Legal Code and Political Symbol«, in: *The Statute of Dubrovnik 1272*, ed. Nella Lonza. Dubrovnik: Državni arhiv u Dubrovniku, 2012: pp. 13-15.

present in Trogir and Zadar.⁸⁸ By contrast, in the provisions and practice of Dubrovnik in the fourteenth century no signs of an oligarchic organisation of offices have been observed.

The closing of the council defined the ruling elite in terms of a legal criterion that linked the membership on the Major Council with the noble status. It implied the consolidation of the governing stratum and the closing of the decision-making space. By closing the council and drawing a clear-cut border of the circle of the city officials there emerged a defined, unique group of the legally equal whose task was to present and promote communal interests. Older, obscure criteria of noble identity were replaced by a transparent and solid criterion, membership in the Major Council. That criterion defined the social and political elite in the centuries to come. This marked an end of a long-term process of the formation and closing of the city noble elite. The final political restriction of the right to eligibility to the Major Council was preceded by a long-running political, social and family practice that can be traced already from the twelfth century, when certain lineages became distinctive and when through office-holding and marriage ties the circle of the noble lineages began to take shape. What was merely anticipated in the twelfth century became more visible and clearer in the thirteenth, when the communal elite had de facto become the owner of the commune and governed its revenues to the general but also personal benefit. The fourteenth century saw the final closing of the circle of lineages that was shaping from the eleventh century. Those who had made a fortune in the late thirteenth and fourteenth century could not enter the noble circle but formed a separate, politically excluded elite which articulated professionally and socially, and established itself in entrepreneurship, confraternities and other non-political frameworks.⁸⁹ Institutionalisation of the privileged status strengthened and consolidated the social borders through a political criterion. With the closing, the citizens, *cives*, finally lost their political and legal authority, and the nobility became the sole power holders. This was accompanied by a new ideological framework which warranted them an exclusive status of being the only competent to defend the interest of the community and collective sovereignty. Communal *aequalitas* implied equality among those who governed,

⁸⁸ Z. Nikolić, *The formation of Dalmatian Urban Nobility*: pp. 93-100.

⁸⁹ Philip Jones, *The Italian City-State. From Commune to Signoria*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997: p. 573; M. Ascheri, *Siena e la città-stato*: pp. 98-100; idem, »La città italiana e un' ambigua tradizione repubblicana«. *Le carte e la storia* 3 (1997): p. 12.

and not within the entire community. The populace accepted the noble class ideology and the social status quo.⁹⁰ The mentioned constitution and the role of the Major Council contributed to the social consensus, which rested on honouring the hierarchy, common good as the government's goal and civil loyalty. The closing of the society by restrictive criteria of birth, political participation, occupation, property rights, class privileges and behaviour codex supported the social hierarchy. This, however, does not mean that the late medieval Dubrovnik society through noble monopolisation of power had become petrified and that it was not subject to change. City community was not reduced to a static, solidly given political and social structure, but was a network of diverse relations and alliances between groups and individuals, beyond the political criteria. Clearly, after 1332 Ragusan nobility became a hereditary, sealed rank with a strong collective identity and ideological backdrop. The closing at the same time consolidated the noble rank and the commune in relation to certain lineages and *casate* which up until the fourteenth century added an almost semi-private character to the city administration. Despite a continuously present interest of certain *casate* to advance in the government as such, government institutions survived as collective bodies which successfully prevented the overlapping of the family with government.⁹¹ In this, Dubrovnik followed Venice, where after the *serrata* family solidarity and alliance between the *casate* was replaced by the authority of the Major Council. The *casate* were the protagonists in the political game, but their sphere of interests was limited by various legal and other measures.⁹² As in Venice, dominant *casate* of Dubrovnik preserved and reproduced their positions not only in relation to the non-nobles but also with regard to the rival noble families. However, this took place within institutions and the political order, and was regulated by mechanisms

⁹⁰ On the reasons of social consensus in medieval and Renaissance Dubrovnik see: Lovro Kunčević, »O stabilnosti Dubrovačke Republike (14.-17. stoljeće): geopolitički i ekonomski faktori«. *Analiza Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 54/1 (2016): 15-17, 26-37. Cf. Claire Judde de Larivière and Rosa M. Salzberg, »Le peuple est la cité. L'idée de *popolo* et la condition des *popolani* à Venise (XVe-XVIe siècles)«. *Annales, Histoire, Sciences sociales* 4 (2013): pp. 1124-1126.

⁹¹ G. Cozzi, »Mletačka Republika u novom vijeku«: p. 264.

⁹² D. Raines, »Cooptazione, aggregazione e presenza al Maggior Consiglio«: pp. 5-6, 18-19, 22-25. Cf. Frederic C. Lane, »Family Partnerships and Joint Ventures«, in: *Venice and History. The Collected Papers of Frederic C. Lane*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1966: pp. 36-55; V. Crescenzi, »Esse de Maiori Consilio«: pp. 331-340; E. Crouzet-Pavan, *Venise: une invention de la ville*: pp. 210, 215-216.

that over the centuries secured stability of the order.⁹³ The entire nobility belonged to the same class, the same Major Council, and was subject to the same laws, measures and control mechanisms. Aristocratic form of government failed to eliminate conflicts, dissenting interests and competition, yet the government had effective instruments to anticipate such aspirations on behalf of the individuals and the *casate*. Further, suspension of the election for the Major Council and introduction of hereditary right to membership implied a considerable narrowing of the responsibilities of the Venetian count, who no longer chose members of the most important governing body. This, at the same time, alleviated political struggles and promoted the authority of Ragusan nobility before the Venetian government. In addition, the homogenous and united elite could better resist the attacks of rulers and magnates from the hinterland. Surrounded by the societies profoundly different from its own, the powers that threatened the security and autonomy of the Dubrovnik community, it was an essential factor of existence.

Dubrovnik awaited the end of Venetian rule and recognition of the Hungarian crown in 1358 with a well-organised administration, laws, legislative and stable ruling elite, which impacted greatly on its privileged position in the kingdom. Legal and political definition of the city nobility and the strengthening of its political, economic and social prestige warranted stability. Strong elite determined the distribution of power and offices, thus avoiding political unrest and changes that could destabilise the state and society. In Dubrovnik noble families were equal in the execution of power, unlike many Italian communes in which particular families were organised into mutually confronted consorteries. In the mentioned situations, the ruling elite was defined by the exclusion of the rival party from power, even from the citizenry, and not by exclusive political right, as was the case in Venice and Dubrovnik. Unlike the elites of Dubrovnik and Venice, such elites were inconsistent, and their unstable regimes in most cases led to signorias or tyrannies. The latter was usually preceded by decades of political struggle, usurpation of communal offices, clientelism, even armed conflicts.⁹⁴ By contrast, Ragusan elite preserved its privileged status and reproduced itself within its own rules and cultural patterns. Ragusan aristocrats adopted the Major Council and other communal institutions, not allowing their acquired rights to be questioned in any manner whatsoever. They justified the

⁹³ For the *casate* of Dubrovnik see: N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, vol. 1: pp. 129-131.

⁹⁴ Ph. Jones, *The Italian City-State*: pp. 584, 601-608, 612-615, 617-619, 622-639.

derogation of those who had not in due time acquired the mentioned rights, declaring every threat against their own privileges as an act of treason. The noble class became exclusive, distinct, one could say that it was virtually corporate and autoreferential. The council remained closed until 1666, yet even later the need to defend the privileges dominated over the need of rank renewal, while the newly ennobled were never fully integrated. Old families refused to accept equal distribution of privileges and powers with the new nobility, and it was impossible to attain the necessary solidarity and consensus within the ruling elite.⁹⁵ Moreover, the political and social exclusiveness of the nobility represented at the same time an embryo of ruin, due to the absence of renewal of the ruling rank, which became evident in the seventeenth century. Thus, in the opinion of N. Vekarić, the decision on the closing of the council was the factor that contributed to the Republic's destruction, first, to its "ageing", and ultimately, to its decline.⁹⁶ Such an outcome points to the weak spot of the nobility's politics, though it should be noted that the very closed nature of the ruling elite happened to be one of the most important factors in the continuity of the governing structures in the Dubrovnik Republic. While Dalmatian cities saw frictions between the nobility and commoners, while many Italian cities witnessed the formation of popular governments which promulgated antimagnate laws and persecuted nobles, in Dubrovnik, however, the nobility governed peacefully, within the traditional frameworks of the medieval government bodies and social relations which were partly changing from the inside, although the frame remained the same over the centuries. Steadfast, legally and politically defined ruling elite was a firm mainstay of stability, continuity and efficiency of the government until the fall of the Republic.

⁹⁵ *Acta Consilii Maioris*, vol. 44, ff. 115, 200-201; *Acta Consilii Rogatorum*, vol. 114, f. 55; Stjepan Ćosić and Nenad Vekarić, *Dubrovačka vlastela između roda i države: salamankezi i sorbonezi*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2005: pp. 66-68; N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, vol. 1: pp. 274-278.

⁹⁶ N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, vol. 1: pp. 225-226.